

# Tswana language

The **Tswana language** (*Setswana*) is a Bantu language spoken in Southern Africa by about five million speakers.<sup>[1]</sup> It is a Bantu language belonging to the Niger–Congo language family within the Sotho-Tswana branch of Zone S (S.30), and is closely related to the Northern and Southern Sotho languages, as well as the Kgalagadi language and the Lozi language.

Setswana is in addition, sometimes referred to as Western Sotho, as a differentiation from its other sister 'Sotho' languages in Southern Africa.<sup>[4]</sup>

Tswana is an official language and lingua franca of Botswana and South Africa. Tswana-speakers are found in the north-west of South Africa, where four million people speak the language. An urbanised variety, which is part slang and not the formal Setswana, known as Pretoria Sotho, is the principal unique language of city of Pretoria. Which is a mixture of all Sotho languages. The three South African provinces with the most speakers are Gauteng (circa 11%), Northern Cape, and North West (over 70%). Until 1994, South African Tswana people were notionally citizens of Bophuthatswana, one of the bantustans of the apartheid regime. The Setswana language in the Northwest Province has variations in which it is spoken according to the tribes found in the Tswana culture (Bakgatla, Barolong, Bakwena, Bathlaping, Bahurutshe, Bafokeng, Batlokwa, Bataung, Bakgatla, Bapo, to name a few); the written language remains the same. A small number of speakers are also found in Zimbabwe (unknown number) and Namibia (about 10,000 people).<sup>[1]</sup>

## Contents

<b>History</b>
<b>Phonology</b>
Vowels
Consonants
Stress
Tone
<b>Grammar</b>
Nouns
<b>References</b>
Notes

<b>Tswana</b>	
<i>Setswana</i>	
<b>Native to</b>	Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Batswana
<b>Native speakers</b>	(4.1 million in South Africa (2011) 1.1 million in Botswana cited 1993) <sup>[1]</sup> unknown number in Zimbabwe 7.7 million L2 speakers in South Africa (2002) <sup>[2]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	Niger–Congo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Atlantic–Congo</li> <li>▪ Volta–Congo</li> <li>▪ Benue–Congo</li> <li>▪ Bantoid</li> <li>▪ Southern Bantoid</li> <li>▪ Bantu</li> <li>▪ Southern Bantu</li> <li>▪ Sotho–Tswana</li> <li>▪ Tswana</li> </ul>
<b>Writing system</b>	Latin (Tswana alphabet) Tswana Braille
<b>Official status</b>	
<b>Official language in</b>	 Botswana  South Africa  Zimbabwe
<b>Language codes</b>	
<b>ISO 639-1</b>	tn ( <a href="https://www.1">https://www.1</a>

## History

The first European to describe the language was the German traveller Hinrich Lichtenstein, who lived among the Tswana people Batlhaping in 1806 although his work was not published until 1930. He mistakenly regarded Tswana as a dialect of the Xhosa, and the name that he used for the language "Beetjuana" may also have covered the Northern and Southern Sotho languages.

The first major work on Tswana was carried out by the British missionary Robert Moffat, who had also lived among the Batlhaping, and published *Bechuana Spelling Book* and *A Bechuana Catechism* in 1826. In the following years, he published several other books of the Bible, and in 1857, he was able to publish a complete translation of the Bible.<sup>[5]</sup>

The first grammar of Tswana was published in 1833 by the missionary James Archbell although it was modelled on a Xhosa grammar. The first grammar of Tswana which regarded it as a separate language from Xhosa (but still not as a separate language from the Northern and Southern Sotho languages) was published by the French missionary E. Casalis in 1841. He changed his mind later, and in a publication from 1882, he noted that the Northern and Southern Sotho languages were distinct from Tswana.<sup>[6]</sup>

Solomon Plaatje, a South African intellectual and linguist, was one of the first writers to extensively write in and about the Tswana language.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Phonology

### Vowels

The vowel inventory of Tswana can be seen below.<sup>[7]</sup>

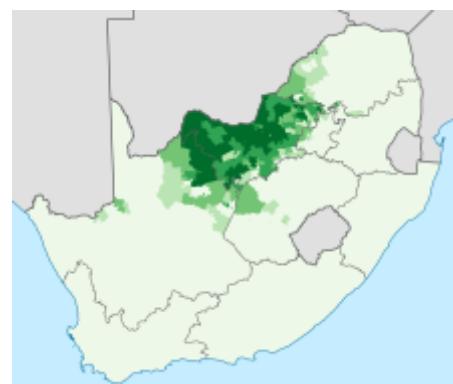
	Front	Back
<u>Close</u>	$\langle i \rangle /i/$	$\langle u \rangle /u/$
<u>Near-close</u>	$\langle e \rangle /ɪ/$	$\langle o \rangle /ʊ/$
<u>Open-mid</u>	$\langle ē \rangle /ɛ/$	$\langle ô \rangle /ɔ/$
<u>Open</u>	$\langle a \rangle /a/$	

Some dialects have two additional vowels, the close-mid vowels /e/ and /o/.<sup>[8]</sup>

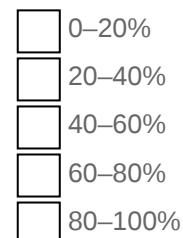
oc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=tn)
<b>ISO 639-2</b>
tsn ( <a href="https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=459">https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=459</a> )
<b>ISO 639-3</b>
tsn
<b>Glottolog</b>
tswa1253 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tswa1253">http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/tswa1253</a> ) <sup>[3]</sup>
<b>Linguasphere</b>
99-AUT-eg

### The Tswana Language

<b>Person</b>	Motswana
<b>People</b>	Batswana
<b>Language</b>	Setswana
<b>Country</b>	Botswana



Geographical distribution of Setswana in South Africa: proportion of the population that speaks Setswana at home.



# Consonants

The consonant inventory of Tswana can be seen below.<sup>[9]</sup>



Geographical distribution of Setswana in South Africa: density of Setswana home-language speakers.



		Labial	Alveolar		Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
			Central	Lateral					
<u>Nasal</u>		$\langle m \rangle$ /m/	$\langle n \rangle$ /n/			$\langle ny \rangle$ /ɲ/	$\langle ng \rangle$ /ŋ/		
<u>Plosive</u>	<u>Unaspirated</u>	$\langle p \rangle$ $\langle b \rangle$ /p/ /b/	$\langle t \rangle$ $\langle d \rangle$ /t/ /d/				$\langle k \rangle$ /k/		
	<u>Aspirated</u>	$\langle ph \rangle$ /pʰ/	$\langle th \rangle$ /tʰ/				$\langle kh \rangle$ /kʰ/	$\langle kg \rangle$ /kχʰ/	
<u>Affricate</u>	<u>Unaspirated</u>		$\langle ts \rangle$ /ts/	$\langle tl \rangle$ /tɬ/	$\langle tʃ \rangle$ $\langle j \rangle$ /tʃ/ /dʒ/				
	<u>Aspirated</u>		$\langle tsh \rangle$ /tsʰ/	$\langle tlh \rangle$ /tɬʰ/	$\langle tʃh \rangle$ /tʃʰ/				
<u>Fricative</u>		$\langle f \rangle$ /f/	$\langle s \rangle$ /s/		$\langle ʃ \rangle$ /ʃ/			$\langle g \rangle$ /χ/	$\langle h \rangle$ /h/
<u>Trill</u>			$\langle r \rangle$ /r/						
<u>Approximant</u>		$\langle w \rangle$ /w/		$\langle l \rangle$ /l/		$\langle y \rangle$ /j/			

The consonant /d/ is merely an allophone of /l/, when the latter is followed by the vowels /i/ or /u/.<sup>[10]</sup> Two more sounds, **v** /v/ and **z** /z/, exist only in loanwords.

Tswana also has three click consonants, but these are only used in interjections or ideophones, and tend only to be used by the older generation, and are therefore falling out of use. The three click consonants are the dental click /l/, orthographically ⟨c⟩; the lateral click /l/, orthographically ⟨x⟩; and the palatal click /!/; orthographically ⟨q⟩.<sup>[11]</sup>

There are some minor dialectal variations among the consonants between speakers of Tswana. For instance, /χ/ is realised as either /x/ or /h/ by many speakers; /f/ is realised as /h/ in most dialects; and /tɬ/ and /tɬʰ/ are realised as /t/ and /tʰ/ in northern dialects.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Stress

Stress is fixed in Tswana and thus always falls on the penult of a word, although some compounds may receive a secondary stress in the first part of the word. The syllable on which the stress falls is lengthened. Thus, mosadi (woman) is realised as [mò̄ 'sá: dì].<sup>[13]</sup>

## Tone

Tswana has two tones, high and low, but the latter has a much wider distribution in words than the former. Tones are not marked orthographically, which may lead to ambiguity.<sup>[14]</sup>

**go bua** /χʊ búa/ "to speak"

**go bua** /χʊ bua/ "to skin an animal"

**o bua Setswana** /óbúa setswána/ "He speaks Setswana"

**o bua Setswana** /vbúa setswána/ "You speak Setswana"

An important feature of the tones is the so-called spreading of the high tone. If a syllable bears a high tone, the following two syllables will have high tones unless they are at the end of the word.<sup>[15]</sup>

**simolola** /símʊlʊla/ > /símʊlóla/ "to begin"

**simologêla** /símʊlʊχεla/ > /símʊlóχεla/ "to begin for/at"

## Grammar

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### Nouns

Nouns in Tswana are grouped into nine noun classes and one subclass, each having different prefixes. The nine classes and their respective prefixes can be seen below, along with a short note regarding the common characteristics of most nouns within their respective classes.<sup>[16]</sup>

Class	Singular	Plural	Characteristics
1.	mo-	ba-	<i>Persons</i>
1a.	—	bô-	<i>Names, kinship, animals</i>
2.	mo-	me-ma-	<i>Miscellaneous</i> (including bodyparts, tools, instruments, animals, trees, plants)
3.	le-	ma-	
4.	se-	di-	
5.	n-m-ny-ny-	din-dim-diny-ding-	<i>Animals</i> (but also miscellaneous)
6.	lo-		<i>Miscellaneous</i> (including a number of collective nouns)
7.	bo-	ma-	<i>Abstract nouns</i>
8.	go-		<i>Infinitive forms of verbs</i>
9.	fa-go-mo-		<i>Adverbs</i>

Some nouns may be found in several classes. For instance, many class 1 nouns are also found in class 1a, class 3, class 4, and class 5.<sup>[17]</sup>

## References

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### Notes

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5. [Janson & Tsonope 1991](#), pp. 36–37
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7. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 16
8. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 19
9. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 10
10. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 3
11. [University of Botswana 2001](#), pp. 11–12
12. [University of Botswana 2001](#), pp. 14–15
13. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 32
14. [University of Botswana 2001](#), pp. 31–32

15. [University of Botswana 2001](#), p. 34
16. [Cole 1955](#), pp. 68–69
17. [Cole 1955](#), p. 70

## General

- [Cole, Desmond \(1955\), \*An Introduction to Tswana Grammar\*, Cape Town: Longmans, Green and Co.](#)
- [Janson, Tore; Tsonope, Joseph \(1991\), \*Birth of a National Language: The History of Setswana\*, ISBN 0-435-91620-3](#)
- [University of Botswana \(2001\), \*The Sound System of Setswana\*, ISBN 99912-71-21-X](#)

## External links

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- [!\[\]\(065aacad479feea1b3f501fa02b79a7a\_img.jpg\) Tswana phrasebook travel guide from Wikivoyage](#)
- [Peace Corps Botswana: An Introduction to the Setswana Language](#) ([https://web.archive.org/web/20110726230507/http://multimedia.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/audio/languagelessons/bots\\_wana/Bw\\_Setswana\\_Language\\_Lessons.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20110726230507/http://multimedia.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/audio/languagelessons/bots_wana/Bw_Setswana_Language_Lessons.pdf))
- [Setswana: Grammar Handbook. Peace Corps Language Handbook Series](#) (<http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=ED205044>)
- ["E-books for children with narration in Setswana"](#) (<http://www.uniteforliteracy.com/>). *Unite for Literacy library*. Retrieved 21 June 2014.
- ["The languages of South Africa"](#) (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110304001836/http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm>). Archived from the original (<http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm>) on 4 March 2011. Retrieved 21 June 2014.
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